

## New Mexican Narratives and the Politics of Home

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The Chicano critic Genaro Padilla states that within the tradition of writing from New Mexico the experiential and discursive network of the Spanish colonial imaginary continues to effect the orientation of conceptions of self and home towards time past (Padilla 31-32). Certainly New Mexico was one of the primary arenas in which the Hispanos first achieved an authoritative sense of self and home in America. Yet the argument that texts dating from Spanish colonisation function as 'genealogically re-empowering narrative[s]' is problematic in the light of recent trends within New Mexico's literary practice (29). Rather than seeking to recover a legitimating relation between themselves and a discourse of possession and domination from the past, it is my contention that contemporary Chicana writing in fact runs counter to this tradition.

New Mexico first acquired its identity as the home of Spanish American culture in the sixteenth century. It was then that imperial Spain conquered and claimed the territory and consolidated its power through an ideology structured around a rigorous system of racial, cultural and social classification (Gutiérrez 82). The diaries, (*diarios*) narratives, (*derroteros*) and chronicles (*crónicas*) dating from this time substantiate this claim. Pedro de Castañeda's narrative, *Relación de la jornada de Cibola conquistada por Pedro de Castañeda de Nájera*, (1542) which details Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's massive exploration of New Mexico, records the establishment of a Spanish homeland through a discourse that "others" indigenous people. They are represented in ways that dehumanise and delegitimize their native social and cultural practices (Herrera-Sobek xxi). The description of the Pueblos given by one of Coronado's party reveals their disappointment at not finding cities of gold but Indian houses that are "stone and mud, rudely fashioned" (Hine and Faragher 5). Lacking European material systems of classification moreover there are also no 'principal houses by which any superiority over others could be shown' (6).

This kind of hierarchical categorization is also reflected in other colonial narratives produced at this time. Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's *Historia de la Nueva México* (1610) similarly records the superiority of the *conquistadores* and their defeat of an alien "other." In the final cantos of the epic Villagrà details the conquest of the Acoma Pueblo situated on a high mesa, in terms that authorize the brutalities: '*Dime sobervia infame como ygualas. /Si como Luzbel quiere lebandarse, /Y el gobierno de todo atribuirse.*' "Behold here this untutored barbarian born of ignoble savages /who like Lucifer Seeks /to reach such heights of power" (Lamadrid 165). Villagrà's representation of the Indians as demonised "other" hints at the later consolidation of Spanish imperialism, which occurred through the Franciscan missionaries and their efforts to convert the region to the Catholic faith (Hine and Faragher 34). Furthermore at that time and contrary to Spanish custom, the Pueblos also endorsed a matriarchy "with women exercising complete control over their households, sexuality and